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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR PM, SA/PAB, EUR/RPM, EUR/ERA AND EUR/AGS

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SUBJECT: EUFOR-ALTHEA: AUSTRIA TO ASSUME COMMAND OF "TASK FORCE NORTH" BY DECEMBER 2005

REFS: A) VIENNA 1966 B) VIENNA 1895

This message is sensitive but unclassified.

1.(SBU) Austrian Defense Minister Platter (OVP) announced June 24 that Austria will assume the command of the Tuzla-based "Task Force North" within EUFOR's "Althea" mission by December 2005. In this capacity, Austria will be responsible for 1,650 soldiers and 500 civilians for the period of one year. Austria will succeed Finland in this role.

2. (SBU) Platter stressed that Austria's upcoming leadership role in EUFOR's "Althea" mission demonstrated Vienna's ongoing commitment to southeastern Europe, which he called a focus area of Austrian foreign and security policy. Austria was interested in stability and peace in the region since both Austria and the EU profited from it. In this context Platter noted that the current army reform at home allowed Austria to assume "even more responsibilities abroad."

3. Platter noted that Austria currently had 1,220 soldiers in missions abroad, including 300 in Bosnia, 550 in Kosovo, 370 on the Golan Heights, and a contingent in Afghanistan (reftels). In the mid-term future, a total of 3,500 soldiers should be available for international missions, Platter said. He conceded, however, that his ministry needed to propose new legislation obliging recruits to serve in international missions, since existing legislation allowed the army to send soldiers on a voluntary basis only.

Brown